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**The New EU-Turkey Agreement:
Shortsighted Considerations vs. Long-Term Perspectives**
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On March 18, 2016, a new agreement was concluded by the European Union and Turkey, similar to a previous deal formulated on November 29, 2015, whereby Turkey agreed to halt the illegal flow of Syrian refugees to Europe in exchange for €3 billion in aid to absorb those already in its territory; negotiations over Turkey's accession to the EU would be expedited; and the process of exempting Turkish citizens from visa requirements for most EU countries would be expedited. The new agreement stipulates that Greece will return "irregular migrants" to Turkey (mainly those who were smuggled into Greece); Turkey will receive an additional €3 billion; the visa exemption processes will be accelerated and completed by the end of June 2016; and a new chapter in the negotiations on Turkey's accession to the EU will open. Chapter 17, which deals with economic and monetary policy, was already opened in mid-December 2015, and Chapter 33, which deals with budget and finances, will open in the second half of 2016. Another new clause in the March agreement states that beginning April 4, for every refugee returned from Greece to Turkey, Turkey can send one Syrian refugee to Europe if s/he entered Turkey legally, and this refugee will be accepted into the EU. This arrangement is limited to 54,000 refugees, in addition to the 18,000 refugees whose acceptance was approved in July 2015. Europe has therefore agreed to accept a total of 72,000 refugees, on top of the hundreds of thousands of non-registered refugees who reached the EU since the outbreak of the civil war in Syria. The parties to the agreement assert publicly that it is designed to halt the bleak situation in which thousands of refugees are dying in the Aegean Sea in an attempt to reach Europe.

A buried clause that is not included in the agreement with Turkey, but in the conclusions document of the European Council (the most senior EU political institution, composed of the heads of state of the EU member countries), reads, "The EU reiterates that it expects Turkey to respect the highest standards when it comes to democracy, rule of law, and respect for fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression."

The latest deal with Turkey highlights the EU's distress regarding the flow of refugees fleeing the Middle East and North Africa, especially those from Syria. To reach Europe, refugees from North Africa, especially Libya, must cross part of the Mediterranean Sea; in contrast, those fleeing Syria for Greece, the nearest EU country, must cross a land barrier, i.e., Turkey. Within four months, through its two deals with Turkey, the EU made it clear that it was willing to pay Turkey a high price for playing the role of a barrier state. The provision of economic aid to countries bearing most of the burden of absorbing refugees from Syria (Turkey, for example, has absorbed 2.6 million refugees) is a correct move, given the many challenges created for these countries by the refugees. If the refugees become reasonably acclimatized in these countries, the aid can help reduce their desire to move on. At the same time, the question arises whether the EU has adequate tools to ascertain that proper use is made of the billions in aid to Turkey. Furthermore, in practice, the EU has no means of forcing Greece to make an effort to locate the refugees illegally entering its territory, and no way of verifying that all of those caught and returned to Turkey are treated properly. Following the first heartbreaking images of refugees being forced to return to Turkey, there is a reasonable possibility that the return-related clause in the agreement will not be upheld.

The recent deal symbolizes the classic conflict between values and interests now confronted by Europe. Under duress, the EU agreed to a series of promises to Turkey, but it is doubtful whether leaders truly believe that they will be able to keep these commitments in the future. The commencement of accelerated negotiations for Turkey's accession to the EU is one prominent example. The two sections on which it was agreed to begin negotiations are relatively easy, but even if the negotiations on all 35 sections are successfully completed, the result will require internal ratification by each of the EU members. The spread of xenophobia and extreme nationalism throughout the EU almost guarantees a negative vote in at least one country, which is enough to torpedo Turkey's accession to the organization. The need for a visa to European countries arouses anger among many Turks, and a solution for this issue, after many years of frustration, stands to be viewed positively among Turkish public opinion. However, the exemption from visas for Turkish citizens is likely to increase the number of Turks residing illegally in EU countries – a development that is bound to intensify the existing opposition to Turkey's joining the EU.

Over the years, efforts to advance toward EU membership have constituted a lever in Turkey for democratic reforms. The buried clause in the European Council's conclusions document concerning expectations of Turkey on the preservation of freedom of expression can only be interpreted in Turkey as European lip service that accompanies a green light to suppression of the internal Turkish opposition and the Kurdish minority. Such lip service was also evident in October-November 2015, when the publication of the

yearly report on Turkey's progress toward EU accession (based on adherence to the Copenhagen criteria), which included much criticism, was postponed until after the general elections in Turkey. Thus, not only is the EU overlooking the fact that Turkey is failing to fulfill these principles, but it also puts Turkey in a difficult situation regarding the protection of human rights in the process of returning the refugees.

Devising systematic solutions to the refugee question in the countries bordering Syria and the EU is important. At the same time, it is doubtful whether the EU and Turkey will be able to meet the terms of the joint agreement in a way that does not harm the refugees further and does not generate new suspicion between the parties. In effect, Turkey has consented to an arrangement in which it is to absorb an unstipulated number of Syrian refugees, with its international image being stained in this context. The problem is made even more acute by the fact that on the refugee question, Turkey's open door policy is actually a prominent and positive aspect of its foreign and domestic policies. The EU is liable to find itself obliged to pay a high price, while it is unclear whether the benefit it receives in return matches the expectations, particularly while losing its main levers of influence over events in the domestic Turkish sphere.

There is no direct connection between the EU-Turkey deal and the emerging agreement between Turkey and Israel, but a number of interesting questions in this context nevertheless arise. The moderation apparent in recent statements concerning Israel by Turkish President **Recep** Tayyip Erdogan and the progress in the bilateral contacts between Israel and Turkey toward an agreement on normalization is directly related to the crisis with Russia, which has made Turkey more aware of the need to reduce the tension. In addition, it is necessary to find substitutes for energy resources from Russia, and Israel and its neighbors possess natural gas reservoirs located only a short distance from Turkey that can serve this purpose. Turkey has also realized that Israel is successfully coping with some of the negative consequences of losing Turkey as a strategic partner by creating a corresponding and competing partnership with Greece and Cyprus. This has made Ankara reconsider the situation. Beyond that, even though Israel has behaved with restraint and non-involvement in all matters pertaining to events in Syria, it will be an important player in any future arrangement in Syria. These are significant assets in the negotiations with Turkey, and Israel ought to maximize them in order to reach long-term understandings with Turkey based on common interests.

One such interest is in creating a new type of arrangement with the EU, assuming that the EU retains its current structure. To be sure, this assumption is questionable, given the ongoing financial crisis, the consequences of the refugee crisis, the terrorist attacks in Europe, and the looming referendum in the UK on remaining in the EU. Turkey still regards the option of becoming a "privileged partner" (instead of full membership) as an

insult, while in Israel, the proposal of a privileged partnership with the EU in exchange for a settlement with the Palestinians has aroused little public interest. Nonetheless, such a model under one heading or another will become necessary in the future. If and when the EU creates a viable alternative to full membership, Turkey, Israel, and other Mediterranean countries will find a common platform to cooperate with the EU.

